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AUTHOR	Banister, Savilla
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes and evaluates the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award process as a model for educational improvement. The Baldrige model is evaluated using the views of M. Greene and E. Eisner and data collected from an elementary public school in which the model has been implemented for 5 years. The Baldrige National Quality Program and Award are managed by the National Institute of Standards and Technology, assisted by the American Society for Quality. Educational criteria have been established as a basis for determining awards to schools. These criteria rely on a seven-point framework similar to criteria established for evaluating businesses. Four of the core values of the Baldrige criteria are: (1) Learning Centered Education; (2) Continuous Improvement and Organizational Learning; (3) Design Quality and Prevention; and (4) Management by Fact. The Baldrige model claims to be nonprescriptive, but whether a school implementing the Baldrige plan can actually embrace an aesthetic vision as outlined by M. Green and E. Eisner was studied at a small inner-city elementary school. The rhetoric of the Baldrige plan did not play out during the supposed implementation of the plan over 5 years at this school. The findings suggest that quality in schools cannot be legislated through a corporate approach to success. (SLD)

A Question of Quality:
The Malcolm Baldrige Criteria as Applied to Education

Five hundred twenty-five thousand six hundred minutes,
Five hundred twenty-five thousand six hundred moments so dear,
Five hundred twenty-five thousand six hundred minutes,
How do you measure – measure a year?

Jonathan Larson

The human species has, throughout history, been engrossed in evaluation and measurement. We poke the melons in the supermarket in an effort to determine which specimen is fit for our table. We surround ourselves with kindred spirits by cross-referencing our personal preferences of personality types with those we interact with each day. We develop standards to determine the best restaurant, the best job, the best home, and the best spouse, though we may not always overly acknowledge these mental guidelines. We discuss batting averages, gas mileage, the stock market, and the Academy Awards, with a keen eye toward quality in sports, products, investments, and entertainment. It is not surprising, then, that we also desire to spend a portion of our energies engaged in efforts to determine the quality of our educational institutions.

When the focus is turned toward our public schools in the United States, the demand for quality is imperious. Taxpayers expect assurances that their money is being well-spent. Parents want to be certain that their children are receiving the best education possible. Business owners clamor for graduates that can productively assimilate into the workforce; and government leaders seek evidence that students are being trained to function as active citizens in a democratic society. Our schools are under pressure to produce documentation that will satisfy this spectrum of expectations. But what kind of process can yield these results?

The corporate sector has recently answered this question by offering the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award process as a model. Originally a continuous improvement design for business, the criteria for this procedure has been rewritten to include educational institutions. Schools choosing to pursue the quality award elect to construct a document detailing their schools' accomplishments as related to the "Education Criteria for Performance Excellence" established by the Baldrige Program.

This paper presents a brief description of the Baldrige process, as it translates into the public school quest to document improvement. I then provide an analysis of this process using the views expressed by Maxine Greene and Elliot Eisner in their respective books, *Releasing the Imagination* and *The Enlightened Eye*, coupled with data collected from an elementary public school in which the Baldrige model has been implemented for the past five years. The ideas of Greene and Eisner, along with teacher perspectives from the case study, provide a lens with which to examine the Baldrige model more closely, in an effort to foster a more critical discussion of the appropriateness of this evaluative program in educational settings.

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Program

Before delineating the specific criteria associated with the Baldrige program for schools, it is beneficial to provide some background information on the development of the model. The United States Department of Commerce is responsible for the Baldrige National Quality Program and the Award, established in 1987. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), an agency of the Department's Technology Administration, manages the Baldrige Program, assisted by the American Society for

Quality, under contract to NIST. A Board of Overseers and a Board of Examiners function as an advisory organiation and as application reviewers, respectively.

Each of these units is characterized by a competitive spirit and a dedication to American dominance in the world economy. The NIST claims to promote U.S. economic growth through its work with industry to "develop and deliver the high-quality measurement tools, data, and services necessary for the nation's technology infrastructure"(Hertz 1999, p. ii). Accelerating the development of high-risk technologies and helping small businesses gain access to information and expertise needed to "improve their competitiveness in the global marketplace" are priorities of the NIST(Hertz 1999, p. ii). The ASQ echoes this theme by striving to be "the world's recognized champion and leading authority on all issues related to quality"(Hertz 1999, p.2). Continuous quality improvement is seen as an avenue to increase the "favorable positioning of American goods and services in the international marketplace"(Hertz 1999, p. 2).

The Board of Overseers, which recommends changes and improvements of the Baldrige Program to the Secretary of Commerce and to the Director of NIST, is composed of national economic leaders. Although these board members evaluate all aspects of the Program, one of their chief responsibilities is to "assess how well the Program is serving the national interest"(Hertz 1999, p. 2). Even the Board of Examiners, though composed of prominent business, health care, and education experts, are chosen by NIST through a "competitive application process." The organizations that constitute the framework of the Baldrige model are unashamedly focused on U.S. economic competitiveness in the global market. Even though public schools are being

courted to enter into this process of continuous improvement, they must recognize the criteria developed for this endeavor is rooted in government and corporate experience.

In 1995, NIST began to develop pilot programs for educational institutions, as well as health care facilities, interested in pursuing the Baldrige Quality Award. Nineteen schools applied for the pilots and received written evaluations on their performance management systems. These feedback reports itemized the perceived strengths of each school, as determined by the Board of Examiners, as well as their opportunities for improvement. In May of 1997, the private Foundation for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award began a fund drive to raise fifteen million dollars as an endowment to begin a full-fledged award program for the education and health care sectors. BY 1998, President Clinton had signed legislation to give educational institutions and health care organizations eligibility in the complete Baldrige process.

The Education Criteria, published for the award process in 1999 and funded by the Department of Education, were to serve as a reliable basis for determining awards made to schools, and as a diagnostic tool for a school's overall performance management system. This program is expected to improve overall school performance, encourage the sharing of best practices, and develop partnerships between schools, businesses, health care organizations, and human service agencies. However, these criteria have the same framework and intent as the Business Criteria for Performance Excellence, though they may differ in issues and language specific to educational settings. Accepting and understanding the Educational Criteria is critical to a school's ability to begin its journey of continuous improvement, as defined by Baldrige. Table 1 presents the 1999 Criteria

categories and items, accompanied by their corresponding point values to be used by the Board of Examiners.

Leadership			**110**
1.1	Leadership System	80	
1.2	Public Responsibility and Citizenship	30	
Strategic Planning			**80**
2.1	Strategy Development Process	40	
2.2	School Strategy	40	
Student and Stakeholder Focus			**80**
3.1	Knowledge of Student Needs and Expectations	40	
3.2	Student and Stakeholder Satisfaction and Relationship Enhancement	40	
Information and Analysis			**80**
4.1	Selection and Use of Information and Data	25	
4.2	Selection and Use of Comparative Information and Data	15	
4.3	Analysis and Review of School Performance	40	
Faculty and Staff Focus			**100**
5.1	Work Systems	40	
5.2	Faculty and Staff Education, Training, and Development	30	
5.3	Faculty and Staff Well-Being and Satisfaction	30	
Educational and Support Process Management			**100**
6.1	Education Design and Delivery	60	
6.2	Education Support Processes	40	

School Performance Results		**450**
7.1	Student Performance Results	150
7.2	Student and Stakeholder Satisfaction Results	100
7.3	Faculty and Staff Results	100
7.4	School-Specific Results	100

The seven-part framework itemized in Table 1, as mentioned previously, is similar to the Business Criteria. The explanation given for this similarity is that this structure is adaptable to the requirements of all organizations, including schools. Translating the language and basic concepts of business excellence to the educational environment, according to the Baldrige model, is a reasonable application. Using similar frameworks across business, health care, and educational institutions will encourage cross-sector cooperation and sharing of best practices information.

The Education Criteria Goals are intended to assist schools in improving their educational services. The two results-oriented goals include:

- Provision of ever-improving educational value to students, contributing to their overall development and well-being; and
- Improvement of overall school effectiveness, use of resources, and capabilities(Hertz 1999, p. 35)

For the purpose of the remainder of this paper, I will concentrate on the aspects of the Baldrige Criteria focusing upon the first goal. While it might be easier to recognize the connections between business practices and school administrative demands embodied in the second goal, as a classroom teacher in a school actively pursuing Baldrige recognition since 1995, I am most interested in how this model impacts student development. In

keeping with this strategy, I will explore four of the core values and concepts presented as key to the Educational Criteria established by the Baldrige hierarchy. Their interpretations of Learning-Centered Education, Continuous Improvement and Organizational Learning, Design Quality and Prevention, and Management by Fact will be interpreted in the succeeding paragraphs.

Learning-Centered Education

Learning-Centered Education, as promoted by the Baldrige model, claims to place the focus of education on learning and the real needs of students. Students real needs are assumed to stem from the demands of the marketplace and the responsibilities of citizenship. Because employees need to be problem solvers and efficient processors of information, in order to be competitive in the global economy, students need to develop problem-solving skills. Students' active learning is an essential component of this process.

Espousing that schools are primarily in existence to encourage every student to develop to his/her fullest potential, a Learning-Centered Education offers opportunities for students to "pursue a variety of avenues to success"(Hertz 1999, p. 35). These avenues are translated into curricula that reflect the requirements of the marketplace and adult citizenship. Targeting the term *effectiveness*, the Baldrige booklet state, "Educational offerings need to be built around learning effectiveness. Teaching effectiveness needs to stress promotion of learning and achievement"(Hertz 1999, p. 35).

Learning-Centered Education is further described as possessing several key characteristics, including setting high developmental expectations and standards for all students. Acknowledging that students may learn in different ways and at different rates,

and that the school setting is complex educators are challenged to constantly search for alternative ways to enhance learning. "The school also needs to develop actionable information on individual students that bears upon their learning."(Hertz 1999, p. 35). The emphasis on active learning can be achieved through greater interaction with external sources such as businesses, community services, and social service organizations. Focusing on transitions from school-to-school and school-to-work are also vital in this design.

Continuous Improvement and Organizational Learning

The Baldrige system is deeply rooted in the core concept of Continuous Improvement and Organizational Learning. In the program, schools are expected to demonstrate ever-higher levels of performance through an expertly-crafted approach to continuous improvement. Clear goals for improvement are articulated, and measures and/or indicators are developed and used to demonstrate progress towards these goals in this model; this insures that the process is "fact-based". It must also be systematic, cycling through seasons of planning, execution, and evaluation and should focus on Key processes as the path to ever-better results.

Furthermore, this approach to improvement must be heavily "embedded" in the school. "Embedded", in the Baldrige sense, connotes the penetrating influence of the strategy for progress.

> Improvement is a regular part of the daily work of all faculty, staff, and students. Improvement processes seek to eliminate problems at their source. Improvement is driven by opportunities to do better, as well as by problems that need to be corrected. (Hertz 1999, p. 36)

This daunting goal of Continuous Improvement enlists the energies of the staff and the students. Everyone is encouraged to contribute to improvement processes by actively offering suggestions, as well as seeking ideas from other organizations' successful practices. Educational and learning research findings should also be considered as driving forces for Continuous Improvement. As faculty and students persevere in their efforts toward improvement, and adjust their practices as better processes are incorporated, Organizational Learning is developed. Processes are refined and an improvement-oriented climate is cultivated that is constantly challenging the status quo and pressing forward toward better results.

Design Quality and Prevention

Another Core Concept of the Baldrige model that relates to the first goal of providing educational value to students is that of Design Quality and Prevention. In educational settings this division concentrates on the effective design of educational programs, curricula, and learning environments. Again, the emphasis is on clear learning objectives that consider individual student needs – needs rooted in the expectations of the marketplace and democratic society.

A quality design in schools also includes an effective means for gauging student progress. The inclusion of an assessment strategy that emphasizes the acquisition of "formative information" is critical. Such information is expected to provide early indications of whether or not learning is taking place. This type of information is to be used to adjust instruction, curricula, or other aspects of the learning environment in order to minimize problems that might arise if barriers to learning are not quickly identified and

addressed. Through this process, students are supported in their efforts to achieve success in the school.

Management by Fact

A final Core Concept in the Baldrige program in Management by Fact. This component accentuates the cause-effect thinking firmly established in the Baldrige dialogue. A strong system of measurement, information, data, and analysis combine to support the continuous improvement design. A Baldrige school with a solid commitment to student learning must utilize a comprehensive and integrated fact-based system. This strategy would include input data, environmental data, and performance data. This data would then be analyzed to extract larger meanings to support evaluation and decision-making throughout the school. Schools are encouraged to organized data systems to provide key information to support the design of improvement strategies. Again, effectiveness is key and the Board of Examiners looks closely at how proficient schools are in their use of measurement and analysis to support student learning and school performance improvement.

A Summary of the Baldrige Model

Thus far, I have outlined the historical and structural elements that impacted the construction of the Baldrige Education Criteria. Focusing on the first goal of the Criteria – to provide "ever-improving education value to students, contributing to their overall development and well-being"(Hertz 1999, p. 35)- I highlighted four of the core values and concepts established for this process.

The developers of the Baldrige plan for educational improvement posit that this program is nonprescriptive and adaptable, noting that the focus is on results, not specific practices, tools, or organizations. "Schools are encouraged to develop and demonstrate creative, adaptive, and flexible approaches for meeting basic requirement."(Hertz 1999, p. 39) With this ideal in mind, I now turn to a discussion of the "art" of education: A vision of an imaginative and perceptive community of teachers and learners, as extrapolated from the writing of Maxine Greene and Elliot Eisner. I will then discuss this vision as it relates to one elementary public school's experience in implementing the Baldrige Criteria over a five-year period.

Releasing the Imagination & Developing the Enlightened Eye: School Improvement from the Perspectives of Greene and Eisner

Greene: Classrooms Transformed through Imagination

Maxine Greene believes that the key to transforming classrooms is the release of the imagination. She begins her conceptualization of "imagination" with a discussion of the difference between "seeing things small" versus "seeing things big." The vision that sees things small, in the context of schools, is "Preoccupied with test scores, 'time on task,' management procedures, ethnic and racial percentages, and accountability measures"(Greene 1995, p. 9), dismissing the presence of individuals. Those who see things big, she asserts, attend to particular children, their families and their environment. Releasing the imagination begins with the willingness to develop a vision form this point of view.

Teachers who recognize individuals are more likely to work in developing curricula that connect with students and offers multiple options. These educators, who see things big, can move forward to develop authentic assessments in their classrooms, rather than succumb to assessments imposed by state and national agencies. Recognizing and celebrating the diversity of students and teachers provides impetus for action. Greene believes that this type of vision has the potential to reform our schools.

As teachers and students begin to develop this vision, Greene challenges them to further develop the imaginative capacity by developing the ability to see things as they could potentially be, rather than as they are. It is critical, she argues, to nurture the ability to envision a better world, in order to make that world a reality. A teacher with such a vision cannot help but inspire and encourage her students to strive for excellence. This way of looking at the world causes teachers and students to acquire a sense of mission, a

quest to work toward a vision of how things might be. This type of passion can be fostered through an arts-enriched curricula.

Greene claims that the arts should be a central part of the school curricula because "Encounters with the arts have a unique power to release imagination"(Greene 1995, p. 27). Literature, music, theater, fine arts, and dance combine to fill our minds with images and emotions that move us to places beyond our daily experience. In the same manner, "transformative pedagogies must relate both to existing conditions and to something we are trying to bring into being, something that goes beyond a present situation"(Greene 1995, p. 51).

Children who are exposed to quality arts experiences are given multiple avenues to tell their own stories, as they have seen authors, artists, poets, and actors do. Much in our society squelches the desire of individuals to share their narratives. We are bombarded by the technological and the bureaucratic. Making meaning as unique persons and exploring our place in a community can be encouraged through artistic expression and appreciation.

Finally, the arts give students multiple avenues to express their intelligence. Besides verbal and mathematical languages, teachers can explore articulation through imagery, body movement, and musical sound. Students are encouraged to find the paths that empower them as citizens. A mastery of these types of expression allows teachers and students to communicate in ways that speak across boundaries. Such communication equips students as ambassadors for a better world, a world that celebrates diversity and harmony.

In summary, Maxine Greene argues for a curriculum that is expanding and deepening, that provides multiple options in seeing the world through literature, images, and music. This type of curriculum can begin the process of releasing the imaginations of those who feel trapped in the educational and cultural confusion of our time. A vision that sees things big, and celebrates the uniqueness of personal journeys may lead to schools that resonate with energy and life.

Eisner: Evaluating Classroom Quality through the Enlightened Eye

Elliot Eisner(1998), in his book, *The Enlightened Eye*, champions an approach to qualitative inquiry based on the researcher's role as an educational "connoisseur" . Comparing the characteristics of a wine connoisseur to one who can eloquently interpret the dynamics of a classroom, he describes the development and benefits of such a viewpoint.

As the term suggest, qualitative studies focus on the *qualities* manifest in a particular setting, and Eisner begins his discussion on connoisseurship by examining a connoisseur's expertise in this dimension. A wine connoisseur develops the ability to experience the visual, olfactory, and gustatory qualities of wine. S/he also experiences these qualities as a sample of a larger class, and is able to locate specific wines, as they are sampled, within a specific array of wines. An educational connoisseur must be able to examine a classroom, through observation, interviews, and document analysis, and ascertain the significant qualities present in the setting. Furthermore, the researcher must be able to coherently relate these qualities to a broader pedagogical context.

Connoisseurship is more than the ability to distinguish complex qualities and position these qualities in a more general framework of previous experience. Knowledge

of the conditions which give rise to certain qualities is also necessary. A wine connoisseur is conscious of the types of grapes, the harvest time, the manner in which the grapes are pressed and processed, and the construction of the wine barrels, in the interpretation of the qualities of a particular wine. So, too, Eisner argues, educational connoisseurs must know the history of a situation, the values present in a certain school, and some background information on particular teachers and students, before adequate interpretations can be made. He concedes that educational environments are extremely complex, and interpreting them in a meaningful and relevant manner is most difficult.

Connoisseurship is an art of appreciation, but appreciation does not always require a positive response. An expert wine taster may taste a sample and make judgments based on the qualities experienced, understanding and reflecting on the environmental factors that impacted those qualities, without favorable categorizing the product. This judgment is a result of the actual qualities experienced compared with years of tasting, sniffing, and visually critiquing similar commodities. Wine makers respect the discernment of a connoisseur, because these critics have proven themselves masters of this art of appreciation. Educational researchers who intend to develop this expertise in their field must convince stakeholders of their abilities to examine educational contexts with similar insight.

Educational connoisseurs, then, must be professionals who have developed, through experience and scholarship, the ability to examine an educational phenomenon and elucidate the characteristics of the phenomenon in a manner that judgments can be made concerning the phenomenon's value in the classroom setting. Eisner's vision of the enlightened eye is compelling, but problematic.

Recognizing and accepting connoisseurship in a technological age where the scientific method and economic projections seem to drive popular opinion is risky. We are people who desire quick fixes and easy answers. A connoisseur offers detailed descriptions, rather than impressive graphs and charts; this type of data is not acceptable to a Board of Examiners. A connoisseur enumerates the variables to consider concerning a problem, rather than pointing to "the answer'. A connoisseur challenges us to develop a broader vision of a situation, rather than maintaining a narrower, exclusionary view. Connoisseurs make us uncomfortable, because they have the ability to emphasize the human, idiosyncratic side of phenomena. Input from connoisseurs may be rejected by scientists and businessmen, who want "hard data' to drive their decisions. Connoisseurship cannot meet the needs of such a clientele.

In the field of education, teachers have traditionally been undervalued as key informants in reform agendas, though their experience might qualify them as connoisseurs. If connoisseurship is nurtured through multiple encounters in the school setting, and an immersion in classroom life, then many teachers should be recognized as experts. Teachers, however, are seldom requested to share their insights and expertise, in an effort to improve schools. Rather, national and state governments, as well as the local school boards, coupled with universities and corporations, drive reform agendas. If wine makers value the opinion of an experienced wine connoisseur, why do policy makers not consider teacher input significant?

This dilemma could be the result of several factors. Many teachers may not be connoisseurs at all. It is possible that, though they have spent a great deal of time in the classroom, they have not developed a keen sense of observation and categorization of

qualities in the setting. Some teachers may busy themselves with the tasks at hand, day after day, with little time for reflection and critical thought. Also, teachers may have little experience outside their own classroom, which could be restricted to a certain grade level, building, or geographic area. This limited experience my not be sufficient to acquire the skills of a connoisseur.

While it may be easy to prove that one is a licensed teacher, it is more difficult to claim the title of "connoisseur". What credentials must be evident for others to accept someone in this capacity? Eisner argues convincingly that a researcher whose reporting is coherent and conveys a sense of realism can be accepted as a connoisseur. Experience, coupled with evidence of critical thought, are characteristics of expertise that should be valued. Encouraging teachers to study their classrooms with an "enlightened eye" and to be more vocal in the conversation of reform could alter the dynamics of the reform movement, but only if those in positions of power are willing to accept the input of these connoisseurs.

Because the concept of connoisseurship allows for the idiosyncratic characteristics of individual students, teachers, classrooms, and schools, it necessarily poses an obstacle to local, state, or national educational policy making. Attempts to prescribe curricula, procedures, and structures for all classrooms does not acknowledge the variability and diversity presented through data generated by connoisseurs. This is another obstacle in the acceptance of such experts.

Despite the weight of resistance from the camps of science, business, and government, connoisseurship offers promising alternatives. Teachers' voices can be given a more prominent position in educational dialogue, when their expertise is

recognized. If they are encouraged to critically examine their own classrooms and experiences and share them with colleagues and administrators, changes may be accomplished that address the needs of individual students.

Summary of the Aesthetic Perspective

Viewing educational practices more artistically and less scientifically promotes an emphasis on the complexity of human interactions and values diversity. Rather than expecting and emphasizing standardization in education, we become freer to experiment, create, and celebrate the many ways people can learn. Connoisseurship's ability to provide rich descriptions of how this is accomplished can encourage further exploration in this area. Multiple intelligences as well as multiple teaching and learning styles, can be valued and nurtured through embracing teaching as an art, not a science.

Connoisseurship frees the educational community from the bonds of narrow visions and restrictive views. By opening up our eyes to the multiplicity and complexity of the classroom, we can celebrate the value of multiple options. We are not limited to one right answer, for people demonstrate various approaches, each with value in certain settings. Connoisseurs can facilitate in discovering and explicating individual successes and unique approaches. Cultivating a reverence for the "specialness" of teaching and learning is a wonderful product of these ideas.

Though the Baldrige model claims to be nonprescriptive, encouraging creative and flexible approaches for meeting the Criteria for school improvement, can a school actually embrace an aesthetic vision, as delineated by Greene and Eisner, and demonstrate improvement as defined by this Criteria? I will explore this question in the

final section of this work, with supporting data gathered from an elementary school which has been pursuing the Baldrige model over a five-year period.

The Baldrige Classroom and the Aesthetic Vision

The Baldrige process does provide schools with a framework in which to evaluate their work. Whether this framework is a valuable structure that will enable educational institutions to improve student learning is debatable. Revisiting the four core values and concepts of the Baldrige model presented earlier in this writing, with some discussion of their relationships to the writings of Greene and Eisner, may assist in the critique. Examples of experiences documented at a small, inner-city elementary school are offered as challenges to the model.

Though "learning-centered education" is a primary target of the Baldrige artillery, the definition of the term cannot escape the business mindset. "Learning-centered" is translated as "effectiveness" in providing students with skills to enter the marketplace, and achievement is defined through standardized test scores. Such interpretations are not confined to our contemporary economic culture. In tracing the influences on American public schools up to the late 1950's, Kliebard (1995) presents convincing evidence for, what he entitles, the "social efficiency" camp. These educational reformists are focused on developing schools that systematically produce students who are trained to enter the workforce. A curriculum that addresses other concerns than that of creating job-ready students is considered frivolous. In reporting student progress in a Baldrige document, information presented which cannot be directly linked to norm-referenced test scores, or marketplace values is considered "anecdotal" and unimportant.

Teachers struggled with these Baldrige realities at Washington Elementary[1]. The staff initially chose to implement the Baldrige Criteria as a replacement for their state's mandated performance based accreditation process for schools. Washington Elementary, serving an 80% at-risk population, was attempting to improve the educational quality of the school and received a special waiver from the state, allowing them to exempt the school from specific state regulations. The state had created this New Horizon[2] option to encourage innovative approaches in school reform. Washington was one of the first schools in the state to be accepted into the program, and proposed a balanced calendar, implementation of the Baldrige Criteria, and a comprehensive tracking of student progress toward the state's essential skills. Exemption from statewide achievement testing was granted as a part of the New Horizon initiative and teachers began an arduous process of developing assessment tools and reports that would provide a clear picture of individual student achievement and need.

However, four years into this endeavor, administrative pressure from outside the school, forced the staff to abandon their elaborate and highly individualized assessment and documentation system, and again adopt the state standardized tests for reporting achievement. The superintendent argued that the test scores were needed as "comparative data" in order to meet the Baldrige Criteria. In other words, the Baldrige model that the staff had chosen years earlier to provide a framework for demonstrating the success of their initiatives was now being used to force them back into a pattern of conformity.

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[1] Pseudonym for 270-student elementary school located in mid-western city of 40,000.
[2] Pseudonym for voluntary state initiative.

From an aesthetic viewpoint, such reasoning seems ludicrous. In order to improve classrooms, and eventually, society, students and teachers need to be encouraged to think beyond the immediate requirements of the marketplace and the status quo. While achievement tests may be able to provide a small indication of student progress, tremendous amounts of information are beyond their scope. Thick descriptions of classroom activities that, by Eisner's definition, might provide evidence of a student's progress or achievement, should be as valued as standardized test scores. Portfolios that chronicle a student's development and records journaling a student's experiences in the visual arts, music, and drama are examples of data ignored through Baldrige analysis. Rather than releasing the imagination in classrooms, and acknowledging the benefits of an arts-enriched curriculum, Baldrige narrows the vision, but it does so, covertly - never explicitly disallowing such documentation, but in establishing a structure that makes non-comparative data inconsequential to the reporting process..

While self-assessments are a critical part of the Baldrige quest for learning-centered education, it is unclear how these self-assessments can be incorporated into the final report. Interest in individual student needs and learning styles are expressed, but "results" are the focus of the Board of Examiners and these results have very limited forms of representation. Qualitative methods could better present information relating to these issues, and a detailed, narrative format would be more useful in describing individual student work and progress. These discrepancies between the Baldrige process and the aesthetic viewpoint cannot be reconciled.

In considering the Baldrige emphasis on continuous improvement and organizational learning, the business world's structure is again imposed on the

educational setting. While it may seem perfectly logical to generate a collection of quantitative measures and indicators from year to year and compare them to determine improvement, further investigation indicates serious flaws in this process. Corporations may be able to control variables and streamline their processes to manufacture a product more efficiently. Classrooms, as Greene describes, are full of unique individuals who come and go with increasing frequency. In some schools, rosters change on a weekly, if not daily basis. Teachers are also bombarded with a plethora of ever-changing regulations and expectations. In this type of environment, drafting a set of performance indicators that will demonstrate continuous improvement makes little sense.

In Washington Elementary's case, their student population was highly transient and the state's once a year achievement tests, once scored and returned, provided data for only about half of the students currently enrolled; the other half of the student body had moved on by that time. This reality, coupled with the fact that twenty percent of the students who took the test had only been at Washington Elementary for less than a month, left the teachers feeling that the test results could not possibly accurately reflect what teaching and learning had taken place at Washington. At least their individualized essential skills assessment records were able to provide them with student achievement data that they could use to guide instruction on a daily basis.

Teachers also noted that, because Washington Elementary practiced inclusion, a high percentage of students in certain classes were identified as special education students with multiple needs and various abilities. Mrs. Driver noted that comparing the standardized test scores of her fifth grade class from last year to the fifth grade class of this year was deceptive. Last year's fifth grade class had a special education population

of forty-five percent. This year's class had only fifteen percent. Again, the data required to demonstrate continuous improvement didn't tell the whole story, and teachers resented this.

In the principal's words,

> The people here, use all of their own personal contacts, personal resources to help the kids here. Whether it be finding that doctor who can help a child who has a need. Finding an organization....I mean individuals will take that on their own, you know, and try to contact....It's not a formal process, there's nothing written down. There are no guidelines. But everybody works to what is best for that child."[3]

Because, "It's not a formal process" and "nothing is written down", the Baldrige process necessarily ignores this type of powerful school dynamic.

Again the principal notes,

> I think that teachers have to be concerned about the whole child. Because if you're just focusing on the academic, then the learning alone, you'll become extremely frustrated because there's going to be ups and downs with the children learning. There are going to be times when they don't bring homework back. It's not what you ideally want to have. And it's not just one or two. I mean it could be half the class that doesn't get it done because of something that's happened at home. So it needs to be a person who can look at the entire child to consider everything that's going on with that child and know when the appropriate time to act is[4]...

Embracing the complexity of the classroom from an aesthetic perspective allows teachers and students to tackle the barriers they face with a spirit of imagination. Setting goals through dreaming of the possibilities, and celebrating the special strengths of each student and teacher, open doors to improvement that may not be readily quantifiable, but are, most certainly, valuable.

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[3] Interview notes, pg. 101.
[4] Interview notes, pg. 103.

The Baldrige concept of Design Quality and Prevention also is problematic, when considering the variables present in the classroom. Those adopting the aesthetic perspective of Eisner and Greene might accept the practice of formative assessment, continually attending to the progress of individual students. However, they would dismiss the notion of striving toward an effective design of instruction that would consistently yield "cookie cutter" results. Such a quest, again, perpetuates a factory-model of education that disregards the unique characteristics of students and teachers, and restricts an imaginative approach. It is also inconsistent with current research on how people actually learn.

The most recent findings of the United States National Research Council concerning teaching and learning support the need for fluidity, rather than rigidity, in creating optimal learning environments.(Bransford, Brown et al. 2000) Teachers need to spend time identifying students' preconceptions in order to address gaps and misunderstandings related to concepts being taught. Productive learning moves toward understanding, rather than concentrating on factual information. Informal, formative assessments conducted regularly by teachers are critical in insuring that the process of real learning takes place. The Baldrige model, as realized at Washington Elementary, did not support these directives.

Finally, the Core Concept of Management by Fact is at odds with an aesthetic perspective of education. The idea of collecting information about how one teaches or how students are learning is not foreign to the aesthetic paradigm, but the criteria used to determine what constitutes factual data conflicts with the Baldrige model. The Baldrige emphasis on quantitative data - whether it is categorized as input, environmental, or

performance - excludes all information that can be expressed through narratives or the arts.

At Washington Elementary, several staff meetings were spent discussing exactly how to collect and present data on aspects of the school that seemed to defy quantitative measures. The "lifeskills" emphasis on characteristics such as "Truth", "Trust", and "Personal Best" were difficult to report in graph-form. Though the front hallway of the school was lined with "Acts of Kindness" reports of teachers and students who were demonstrating these qualities, teachers were frustrated because they couldn't come up with a way to establish baseline data and charts for continuous improvement in this domain. The principal mentioned at another staff meeting that, although service-learning was an integral part of the education at Washington, she had no data to demonstrate its importance. A group of students and teachers did research the service learning activities and designed a brochure to showcase them, but whether this work would be acceptable to include in their final Baldrige documentation for the year was questionable.

Management by Fact also became a burden on the teachers and students at Washington Elementary. Constantly constructing and/or completing surveys which could provide various pools of data was wearisome. Ending daily class sessions and every committee and staff meeting with a "plus and delta" evaluation time eventually became mundane. Students began to groan when teachers asked them to participate in this process. The classroom system checks that arrived in the teachers' mailboxes in February were a source of sarcasm. Considering these reactions, it is difficult to believe that the data gathered in these settings was totally reliable, yet, according to the Baldrige model, this data could confidently be presented as evidence in the quest for quality.

Final Thoughts

The Baldrige National Quality Program's *Education Criteria for Performance Excellence* is a poor attempt to encourage school improvement. The rhetoric embodied in the model does not play out during implementation. Rather, the model leads schools into a maze of meetings, surveys, and jargon. Teachers and administrators who are already overwhelmed with the amount of bureaucratic "hoop-jumping" in their lives, do not need another complication from government and business interests. While some of the concepts and values expressed in the continuous improvement design have merit, the program, as a whole, is short-sighted and narrow in focus.

I primarily focused on the first result-oriented goal of Baldrige, providing ever-improving educational value to students. It is possible that the second goal - improving overall school effectiveness, use of resources, and capabilities - might be better served through the process, simply because larger schools tend to be run more like factories, by necessity. Improvement in the areas itemized in the second goal might be achieved through participation in a business-based program.

While evaluation and a search for the best in quality seems to be an inherent part of the human condition, quality in schools cannot be legislated through a corporate approach to success. Eisner's description of the educational connoisseur provides another guide to determining quality in schools. Maxine Greene's case for developing classrooms infused with experiences in the arts shares an idea of what better schools might be. Administrators and teachers who choose to work toward this vision need to be recognized for their willingness to catch a glimpse of what our schools could become.

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Organization/Address: ~~Indiana University~~	Telephone: 812-376-6575 FAX: 812-376-4446
	E-Mail Address: sbanister@indiana.edu Date: 4/10/01

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